USER EXPERIENCES OF PRESCRIPTION AND OVER-THE-COUNTER DRUG ABUSE IN ADEN CITY, YEMEN.

Introduction
Abuse of prescription and over-the-counter drugs (OTC) is globally on the rise. In 2015, stable or downward trends for illicit drugs (barbiturates and cocaine) among most regions of consumption worldwide were being offset by an increase in synthetic and prescription drug abuse. Studies about drug abuse and misuse in Yemen are still scarce. Besides, Khat chewing is legal, socially acceptable and also a risk factor for the abuse of other drugs in the Yemeni community.

The literature reported using prescription or OTC drugs either during (to potentiate its effect) or after Khat chewing sessions (to minimize the unwanted CNS and GIT side effects). However, the patterns and methods of mixing drugs with Khat in Yemen are still unknown. The pharmacists often encounter this problem and the obvious lack of literature has never been investigated before this study. In addition, this study was part of a larger project including both types of study (Qualitative & Quantitative).

Methods

Data collection
- Sampling: convenience sampling was used, with a help from community pharmacists, who acted as gatekeepers, customers suspected of misuse of OTC/prescription medications in combination with Khat were recruited (April - Sept 2013).
- Data collection and tools: audio-recorded in-depth interviews of 38-50 minutes each for in a private area at the community pharmacy. A 7-page guide in Arabic language was developed. A data collection tool was used only if data saturation had been achieved.
- Confidentiality: all participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Audio recordings were destroyed post-transcription.
- Safety and Security: due to unsafe and unequal situation in the area, the researcher (EAS) had to be accompanied by two related male relatives all the time who stood at the door of the pharmacy in order to provide security and more comfort for the interviewee.
- Exclusion Criteria: users who visibly carried weapons (medium size and above) were obviously noticeable.

Data analysis
- Content & Thematic analysis, using a thematic approach which was adopted

RESULTS

Experience of participants with drugs
1. Drug dealers and friends were the main sources of supply of drugs
2. Drug effects reported by interviewees were altered, depending on the drug and dose used and whether mixed with Khat or not, to achieve the desired effect

Patterns of mixing Khat with Drugs
- sunnati (alcohol)
- Chawrni with Khat
- Pharmacist
Role of Pharmacists and Physicians
1. How do you get your drugs from the pharmacy?
   "When the pharmacist refers, I had to use my gun. Now I don’t have to go to the pharmacy as long as the drugs are available from dealers"

   "No, the pharmacists doesn’t refer at all, he’s my friend"

2. Has any doctor asked you about the drugs problem?
   "Doctors are afraid to ask if I consume drugs; there’s one doctor who asked my friend once, but there was no reaction from his side. The doctor can do nothing.

   "Doctors are usually afraid to talk to families and even to us, because of the weapons"

DISCUSSION

Mixing drugs with Khat:
➢ The combination of sedatives with stimulants was the most used during the Khat session. This is similar to what has been reported in Ethiopia and Kenya, in which Khat chewing was frequently consumed with alcohol and intake of benzodiazepines.

➢ Mixing Khat ‘Stimulant’ with ‘Sedatives’ could be more dangerous and unpredictable. The user would not feel he was sedated as much as benzodiazepines were the only drugs taken.

Health professional’s role and violence:
➢ The spread of guns and modern weapons have been increasingly prevalent in the last few year. Similar Violence and aggression among drug abusers have been reported in other studies.

➢ This violence was also reflected in doctors and/or pharmacists being afraid to counsel individuals suspected of abusing drugs. One reason for this could be the lack of training on how to deal with such violent cases.

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